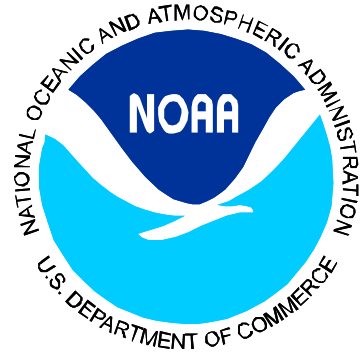


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# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**June 25, 2004**

## **NOAA TO LAUNCH MAJOR WHALE RESEARCH CRUISE**

SEATTLE – The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will launch a major research cruise on June 27, 2004, from Seattle, Wash., as part of the single largest whale survey ever undertaken to assess humpback whale populations throughout the North Pacific Ocean. Scientists will be available for media interviews on June 25, 2004, at the NOAA Marine Operations Center in Seattle to discuss this important research effort. (See media availability release at <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/PA/cruise.htm> ).

"We'll be taking the NOAA ship *McArthur II* along the coast of Washington and British Columbia, through the Gulf of Alaska, and out the Aleutian chain to the Bering Sea," said Jay Barlow, the NOAA chief scientist on the ship. "We'll be at sea for 120 days, exploring offshore areas rarely surveyed for humpback whales since whaling ended 40 years ago."

This cruise marks the launch of the summer portion of a larger study announced earlier in Hawaii this year, known as the "Structure of Populations, Level of Abundance and Status of Humpbacks," or SPLASH for short. SPLASH is a three-year project involving NOAA scientists and hundreds of other researchers from the United States, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Canada, the Philippines, Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua and Guatemala. This is the first systematic survey ever attempted to determine the humpback whales' overall population, structure, and genetic makeup as well as affects of human interaction such as ship strikes or net entanglement scars

Surveys will also take place simultaneously during the *McArthur II*'s northern cruise. These surveys will be conducted off the West Coast of the U.S. by Cascadia Research, a non-profit research organization in Olympia, Washington; off British Columbia by Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans; in coastal waters of Alaska by collaborating researchers; and in Russian waters by Russian scientists. Early summer SPLASH observations from the *McArthur II* were recorded this month in Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of Washington. Surveys along the West Coast of the U.S. will be conducted primarily with small vessels with an emphasis on coverage in the five National Marine Sanctuaries in California and Washington. John Calambokidis of Cascadia Research, will be the regional coordinator for the West Coast and will be responsible for the central data compilation and photographic matching.

Researchers will be able to quantify the number of humpback whales by photographing the animal's tail, also known as a fluke. The pigmentation patterns on the fluke act like a fingerprint and are unique to each animal. Scientists can determine population numbers by comparing photographs taken in northern feeding grounds compared with those from the southern breeding areas. Small amounts of tissue will also be obtained to study genetic information that includes population structure, genetic variability, and overall health.

Humpback whales in the North Pacific Ocean feed near the Arctic in the summer and travel up to 3000 miles to warmer tropical waters in the winter to breed and give birth to their young. The SPLASH project has surveyed the breeding areas for this year and will use this cruise to document humpback whales in their feeding areas in the northern latitudes.

Humpback whales were nearly driven to extinction before an international ban on whaling was adopted in 1964. They were listed as an endangered species in 1973 and remain protected under the Endangered Species Act to this day.

NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and National Ocean Service (NOS) are all teaming up to ensure the success of the SPLASH project.

NOAA's NSMP seeks to increase the public awareness of America's maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, the sanctuary program manages 13 national marine sanctuaries and one coral reef ecosystem reserve that encompass more than 150,000 square miles of America's ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources.

The NOS manages the NMSP and is dedicated to exploring, understanding, conserving and restoring the nation's coasts and oceans. The NOS balances environmental protection with economic prosperity in fulfilling its mission of promoting safe navigation, supporting coastal communities, sustaining coastal habitats and mitigating coastal hazards.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

#### **-NOAA-**

##### **On the Web:**

Research Cruise/SPLASH Information: <http://swfsc.nmfs.noaa.gov/prd/PROJECTS/splash/default.htm>

Hawaii SPLASH: [http://www.hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/special\\_offerings/sp\\_off/splash/splash.html](http://www.hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/special_offerings/sp_off/splash/splash.html)

NOAA Research Vessel McArthur II: <http://www.moc.noaa.gov/mt>

NOAA Research Vessel McArthur II photos: <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/news/noaamac.htm>

NOAA Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary: <http://www.ocnms.nos.noaa.gov>

Cascadia Research: <http://www.cascadiaresearch.org>

Media availability release at <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/PA/cruise.htm>